

A Child's Moment

By Joe Postove

The assimilation of a child into the years before him should be a peaceful thing. On November 22nd, 1963 my absorption of the world became a slamming of the brakes of understanding. My six years and eleven months on the planet stopped with a vicious violent act I did not understand. A child's life and mind ought to be unencumbered by the horridness of the world the adult's make for him. But, alas, it can never be.

The day John Kennedy was killed I was two and a half months into the first grade. Life was good. I had a teacher, Miss Brinson, who I dearly loved. I was out of the house, and by learning, I was becoming aware of just how uninformed I was. But I knew Miss Brinson would teach me the world.

She was so cool. Months before the Beatles came ashore in 1964 Miss Brinson played their records for us after school as we waited for the buses to come back from taking the first group of students home. I was on the second load. So on November 22nd we waited, as we did every day, for the buses to come back to bring us home.

The loud speaker crackled with the voice of Mr. Copley, our principal. He was a frightening man who expected that even first grade students should know things that were not possible to cognize. That is why, I think, he announced calmly that the President had been shot. He was not dead, just shot. He turned the microphone of the loud speaker to a radio and we listened to the man describe what was happening in Dallas.

I didn't know what to think. I knew who the president was. I knew that in our house he was venerated and respected. But I knew Shari Lewis and Captain Kangaroo far better than John Fitzgerald Kennedy. I think I had a common place child's mind. And that is like a dream, where the characters on the world stage are morphed often from one creature to another. I confused Khrushchev with Eisenhower, Chubby Checker with Jack Paar and perplexity with comprehension.

I had not yet experienced death. No one in my life was dead or dying, and I accepted this as the regularity of life. Mom and Dad were always there. My brothers and sisters were around somewhere, but I knew they were close by. And television was real. Life was neatly braided; a closed book that I was satisfied with. Then that world exploded. But in a way I could not understand.

So we sat. We sat waiting for the buses to come back and fetch us home. We also sat for the crackle of the loud speaker for more news about the president. Miss Brinson sat at her desk, shuffling papers, looking busy and gloomy. She was my first love and I was more worried about her than the president. This is how a six year old mind works. If it does not affect you or those you care about, essentially it did not happen. The difference in my reaction to this day's events can be severely contrasted with the copious tears I spilled for John Lennon seventeen years later.

The clock up high on the wall next to George Washington and President Kennedy read 2:30 when Mr. Copley opened up the loudspeaker for another announcement. This time, his voice cracked along with the crackle of the speaker. "The President has died, would everyone please stand for the national anthem".

By then Miss Brinson was standing next to me. She was so tall, as tall as a tree; and when she stood I had to crane my neck uncomfortably to see her face. Her entire body was shaking with emotions I did not apprehend. But I knew that the face of the teacher that I loved so was stained entirely with tears. She was the first adult who I ever saw in tears. So I began to cry

And so, it was with the tears of another who was mourning a man I barely knew of, that took me into the world of grownups for the first time.

I will always regret it.

